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William C. Nelson to J. H. & Maria C. Nelson (1&3 July 1861)

William Cowper Nelson

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Camp Magnolia, near Warrington, Fla.
Monday, July 1st 1861.

My Dear Mother;

I was much gratified by the reception of your last letter, sent by Lieut. Balfour, I am very much in hopes, that your wishes in regard to the speedy termination of the war, may be gratified. Nothing would give the body of the soldiers greater pleasure than the news of peace, that is, if it could be secured honorably. We would rather die, than accept it, on any other terms. It is true we are in a position which is calculated to make one dissatisfied, but still if those high in command deem it expedient to keep us here, we are willing to stay the twelve months out, at least I am. We are now on the eve of a dreadful crisis, a few days will be sufficient to develop the policy of the abolition rulers, we will either have an immediate peace, or desperate, bloody and cruel war; if peace is not declared, we will probably have a fight here in a week, if it does come on, it will be brought about by the enemy, and if that be the case, we have no fear as to the result; we have picked guard stationed every night now down on the lagoon, for several miles, and there is no chance for our being surprised.

I have not had an opportunity of seeing Mrs. Chalmers, since the reception of your last, but will deliver the message, as soon as I see her. Mrs. McKissack is staying at Col. Strong's with her now. Last Friday we went down there to our parade ground to manoeuvre in battalion drill, the Col. expressed himself much pleased at our improvement. Our daily routine of duties is now distributed as follows, Reveille at a quarter past four, breakfast at five, drill from six to eight, manual drill, i.e. drill in the manual of arms. from ten to half past ten, dinner at twelve, battalion drill from four to six, dress parade at half past six, guard mounting at

seven, tatts at eight, taps for extinguishing the lights at half past nine, this order went in operation this morning, so you now see we have very little time to devote to rural excursions or shell gathering; on last Saturday Willie Raines, Gus, Powell and myself went out in the country about 2 miles, on a little private foraging expedition, we first went to a house where we procured a half gallon of buttermilk, a water melon sweet milk, huckle berries and sugar, these little refreshments we speedily devoured, and then pursued our travels seeking for more, fortunately we succeeded in finding another house, where we engaged dinner, and got another water melon, for dinner we had, butter beans, corn, squashes, tomatoes & cucumbers in the vegetable line, than dinner reminded me more of home, than any I have eaten since I have been here, The hostess was a very clever old lady, spoke more kindly and expressed more sympathy for the soldiers than any one I have seen down here, we spent a very pleasant day, and returned to camp, hoping that we would soon have an opportunity of repeating our visit, Raine brought home with him a little supply of vegetables, and a gopher, and the next day I dined with him, the principal dish, being gopher soup, probably you don't know what a gopher, it is an animal which very much resembles a turtle in appearance, and whose flesh is also very similar, though considered by connoisseurs superior in delicacy, they burrow in the earth, and can easily be caught, as they don't bite, they are consequently quite cheap, selling in Pensacola, for a dollar per dozen, their average size is about as large as a hat, but enough of the goppers, I expect you are tired of them, we have not received our pay yet, but will in a few days, I went to service last Sunday as usual, the text was John 1st 4th Chapter 8th verse, "God is love." I am very sorry that you are debarred the privilege of attending divine worship according to the dictates of your own conscience, I hope the day is not far distant when we will have

minister of our own, I say our own, for my conviction is that the day is not far off that will see us united again. God grant that it may be so. It does seem strange that the rulers of the North should be so utterly foolish, so blind to their own interests. What can they hope to gain by prolonging this "most cruel, bloody and unnatural" warfare? absolutely nothing. It is impossible that they should subdue us, and it is folly in them to deny our independence, when it has been acknowledged by the European powers. If they are not totally infatuated and carried away by fanaticism, they will most assuredly recognize our equality; when Congress meets, and thus put an end forever to this horrible civil war, for it can hardly be called anything else, for are not brothers arrayed against brothers, sons against fathers? and many of the most sacred ties that bind mortals together, severed, mayhap forever; they have already accomplished sufficient mischief, to require years of expiation, they ought to be satisfied with the misery they have so far produced, without seeking to render their fault unpardonable, which they will do, by prosecuting the war.

I beg your pardon for speaking as I did concerning my friends who were so solicitous about my welfare, but their officiousness irritated me a little. Jim says that I must tell you, that he intends taking pains to procure some nice shells. It will be almost impossible for me to procure any more, unless I go on Sunday, or miss drill some other day, the former I will not do, and I dislike to do the latter. Gus has recovered from his indisposition, he sends his best love, both to you and Father, I hope you will not carry out the thought contained in your last, about not occupying the new house, till I return. I think that you think too much of your wayward boy, he is not worthy of so much consideration, but if you wish to gratify him, you can do so, by occupying the house at once.

Your devoted son
Will

Camp Magnolia, near Warrington, July 3^d 1861,

My Dear Father;

News of the 2^d Battⁿ has been received and should have been answered before, but I had written to Mother the day it arrived and had nothing to communicate. Yesterday evening a report came to camp, saying that the enemy were attempting to land down at Perdido Bay, it proved however as most of the rumors we hear, to be without foundation. We will know I hope in a few days whether we will fight here or not. If we do not fight here during the present month, we won't fight at all, for about the last of this month the stormy season sets in down here, and it will be impossible for the war vessels (of which there are now ten) to lay off the coast, at anchor, they would be dashed to pieces, or grounded on the shoals, and the enemy will never commence the attack without the assistance of the fleet.

It is raining here to-day, the weather is very pleasant though not oppressively warm, nothing like as hot as it is in H. at this season of the year. You wrote me that Henry Booth was Adjutant in the 18th Reg. I hear from another source that he is only a private, which is correct. Col. Falkner, I see has been appointed Brig. Gen. he was you know Col. of 2^d Reg't Miss. Vol. He appointed George Miller ^{son of the Judge} his Aide de Camp. I received a letter from Bickham the other day, he is 3^d Sergeant in the Miss. Grays, they are now at Winchester. Couldn't you send Cass's trunk by Bob, Williamson or Billy Crump, it would be a great favor. Everything is very high in Pensacola, Flour 18 per barrel I think, they give us about half our rations in meal now.

Hooper who has been with this Brigade, intends abandoning the business, he says he can't make it pay, he sold hams at 22 1/2, molasses 60 cts.

Tell Tom I am anxiously waiting for an epistle from him, say to him that he will make a great man a Lieutenant at 13,